



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

New Bedford Whaling  
National Historical Park

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## New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park News Release

For Immediate Release

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### **New Bedford 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students visit New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park**

New Bedford, MA— In March, New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park achieved a milestone when every eighth-grade student in New Bedford was able to spend a day in the park connecting with the city's rich history and culture. Eight hundred and six students from Keith, Roosevelt, and Normandin Middle Schools were introduced to stories of New Bedford's whaling legacy, the local history of the Underground Railroad, and the fishing industry that sustains the city today. This exploration of the national park included visits to various partner sites. The field trips were made possible through a collaborative effort between the National Park Service, the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the Ocean Explorium at New Bedford Seaport, and the City of New Bedford Public Schools. Students participated in docent-led tours of the whaling museum, an Underground Railroad activity presented by park rangers and volunteers, and a program at the Ocean Explorium utilizing the *Science on a Sphere* exhibit.


The New Bedford Whaling Museum component offered students an in-depth look at the experience of African Americans in nineteenth century New Bedford. Museum docents examined New Bedford's abolitionist roots, discussed the contributions that African Americans made to the whaling industry and illuminated the impact that whaling had on New Bedford's African American community. To illustrate these themes, the program focused on inventor Lewis Temple, ship-owner Paul Cuffe, abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the founding members of New Bedford's Quaker community. In describing the program, Sara Meirowitz, Director of Education, said, "This was a wonderful opportunity for us to work closely with our partners at the National Park and in the New Bedford Public School System to provide an in-depth and meaningful experience; telling the story of the important African American contributions to the whaling industry. As a result of the positive feedback we have received, we plan to expand the program into a lasting tour option for all school groups."

During the Ocean Explorium part of the program, students reviewed the standards they have learned in school by using the global visual medium of the Science on a Sphere. Students were whisked away on a tour of the planets, they discovered why Earth is unique

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in the Solar System, they learned why Earth is so hospitable to life, and explored how energy is transferred around the planet and through living things.

In addition to learning about the national park in their city, students were exposed to some of the untold stories of New Bedford's maritime and Underground Railroad past by visiting local memorials, monuments, and historical sites in the park. Some of the sites visited were the Nathan and Polly Johnson house, which was the first free home of Frederick Douglass after he escaped slavery, the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Plaza, which was the site of the local recruiting station for the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment, the Lewis Temple Statue, and other significant sites in and around the park.

Students were enthusiastic about this field trip, writing about their experiences in a feedback session. One student wrote, "I like that we explored and were exposed to our history....and found out a little more about what happened back then." Summing up the day, another student remarked, "I especially liked the walk around downtown; it was a really good chance to learn about the historical landmarks around New Bedford. Overall, I think it was a really excellent field trip."

The National Park Service Education Collaborative, which consists of local historical and cultural organizations sharing similar missions with the park, met with the Superintendent of Schools and the Social Studies department head in January to discuss new ways that the park and its partners could work more effectively with the New Bedford Public Schools. One of the results from that initial meeting was to have a collaborative field trip experience for eighth graders from the city's three public schools. The field trip was a pilot program that the National Park Service Education Collaborative hopes to offer every year. The Education Collaborative is currently working on the development of a web-based aid that can be used by teachers at all grade levels to plan customizable field trips using the wealth of historical and cultural organizations available in the city.

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park preserves and interprets parts of New Bedford, Massachusetts that are associated with the history of whaling. The park works in partnership with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the City of New Bedford, local institutions, and the Inupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska. It includes a visitor center, the Corson Building, the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the Seamen's Bethel, the schooner Ernestina, and the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum. More than three million people have visited New Bedford Whaling since it was designated as a park in 1996. For more information about New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, visit [www.nps.gov/nebe](http://www.nps.gov/nebe)

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